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TELEGRAM

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ROME 00538

E.O. 12356: DECL: 1/12/69
TAGS: PING, PREL, SHUM, AR, IT
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER COLOMBO CONFRONTS ITALIAN
SENATE ON QUESTION OF MISSING PERSONS IN ARGENTINA

REF: 82 BUENOS AIRES 727A

1. SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 11, FOREIGN MINISTER COLOMBO FACED HOSTILE QUESTIONING IN THE ITALIAN SENATE ON THE SUBJECT OF GOI BEHAVIOR RE THE DESAPARACIDOS. THE ESSENCE OF COLOMBO'S REMARKS WAS THAT GOA RESPONSES TO ITALIAN APPROACHES HAVE BEEN INADEQUATE, THAT MFA HAS PURSUED THE MATTER VIGOROUSLY WITH THE ARGENTINES AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO, AND THAT IN FACT ITALIAN SUCCESSSES TO DATE IN SECURING THE RELEASE OF DETAINED ITALO-ARGENTINES HAS BEEN NOTEWORTHY. AS EVER IN ITALY, INTERNAL POLITICS PLAYED A ROLE IN THE DEBATE. PRESS COVERAGE WAS HEAVY, BUT WE SUSPECT THAT DOMESTIC ATTENTION TO THE MATTER WILL DIE DOWN FOR THE PRESENT. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) IN A FORTY-FIVE MINUTE ADDRESS TO THE ITALIAN SENATE ON JANUARY 11, FOREIGN MINISTER COLOMBO REVIEWED IN DETAIL ITALIAN ACTION TO DATE ON THE SUBJECT OF MISSING/IMPRISONED ITALO-ARGENTINES. HE INITIATED HIS ADDRESS WITH THE REMARK THAT ITALY "COULD NOT ACCEPT AS VALID AND SATISFACTORY" THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT'S CLAIM THAT IT KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT THE MATTER. COLOMBO AFFIRMED, HOWEVER, THAT -- KEEPING IN MIND THE INTERESTS OF THE ITALIAN COLONY IN ARGENTINA -- GOI WOULD STAND TO GAIN NOTHING BY DRIVING BILATERAL RELATIONS TO THE BREAKING POINT.

3. COLOMBO THEN REVIEWED IN DETAIL THE NUMEROUS APPROACHES (477 DIPLOMATIC NOTES, INNUMERABLE VERBAL DEMARCHES, ETC.) THAT ITALY HAD MADE TO GOA TO DATE ON THE MISSING. FOR THIS HE DREW HEAVILY FROM THE DOCUMENT POUCHES TO DEPARTMENT AND BUENOS AIRES ON DECEMBER 2, 1982. HE NOTED THAT APPROACHES HAD ALSO BEEN MADE TO THE EC AND THE UN, AND THAT FORMER PRIME MINISTER SPADOLINI HAD RAISED THE MATTER WITH UNDOY PEREZ DE CUELLAR AS RECENTLY AS NOVEMBER 5 OF LAST YEAR. ALL THE ABOVE HAD RESULTED IN THE RELEASE, BETWEEN 1974 AND THE PRESENT, OF 318 INCARCERATED ITALO-ARGENTINES OUT OF 352, WHICH COLOMBO FEELS IS A GOOD TRACK RECORD.

4. (U) COLOMBO ALSO RECALLED THAT THE ITALIAN EMBASSY IN ARGENTINA HAD HARBORED MANY POLITICAL REFUGEES OVER THE YEARS AND THAT OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WERE ALSO AT LONGSHANKS WITH GOA ON THE MISSING PERSONS QUESTION. IN CONCLUSION HE NOTED THAT DESPITE THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED, ITALY HAD SPECIAL TIES WITH ARGENTINA WHICH SHOULD BE PRESERVED, AND THAT MFA WOULD CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR INFORMATION ON THE MISSING AND FOR THE RELEASE OF THOSE STILL IN JAIL.

5. QUESTIONING BEFORE AND AFTER COLOMBO'S REMARKS WAS HOSTILE, NOTABLY FROM THE COMMUNIST AND SOCIALIST SENATORS, BUT ALSO FROM SOME CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF FRINGE PARTIES. THE GOAL OF THE COMMUNISTS IS, OF COURSE, TO DISCREDIT GOI BY ACCUSING IT OF BEING SOFT ON FASCISM. THE SOCIALISTS, WHO NATURALLY COSET MFA, ARE BUILDING THEIR IMAGE -- WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE -- AS A PARTY THAT IS HARD ON DICTATORSHIPS. IN FACT, THE DEBATE WAS MAINLY PROMPTED BY THE RECENT RETURN TO ITALY FROM ARGENTINA OF SIX ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS, WHO HAD GONE THERE TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER (REFTEL).

6. COMMENT: THOUGH MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE JANUARY 11 DEBATE WAS HEAVY, ESPECIALLY IN THE LEFT-LEANING PRESS, WE SUSPECT THAT THE MATTER WILL NOW DIE DOWN FOR A WHILE. DESPITE THE ATTACKS ON MFA, ITS RECORD APPEARS GOOD, ESPECIALLY IF WE TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO HAVE ATTAINED FREEDOM. INTEREST WILL NOT FULLY ABATE HERE IN ITALY, HOWEVER, UNTIL GOA COMES TO GRIPS WITH THIS HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ISSUE.

BRIDGES

SAUM-
Argentina-
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DECONTROL

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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